

would begin. That is the kind of program that the Federal Government likes. It means that you don't necessarily get what you put into the program itself.

We believe that American taxpayers have the right to receive every dollar back that they put into the Social Security program. We believe that the Social Security trust fund money ought not be spent on anything but Social Security retirement benefits. We believe that is a right that Americans have. We believe that is a responsibility that this Congress has in a positive way to say we will limit the spending of that money to what it was intended for. We believe in American values and American vision, that Federal taxpayers have a right to a balanced budget without raising taxes.

There are a number of ways that you can get to balancing the budget. You can get to it by increasing taxes. You can tax businesses and you can tax people, successful people and folks all across this Nation who work for a living. You can tax them and take more of their hard-earned money and for the short term you can balance the budget. Yes, you can.

But the way to responsibly balance the budget that embraces American values and that embraces American vision and that allows people to succeed and dream and work hard and have the benefits of their labor, the way to do that responsibly is not to take more of their money. The way to do that responsibly is to decrease spending, is to decrease and restrain the growth of government, and to make it so that the Federal Government does what the Federal Government ought to and ought do only. And that requires, I believe, Madam Speaker, a balanced budget amendment.

As I mentioned, folks on both sides of the aisle have difficulty with spending too much of the American taxpayers' hard-earned money. We believe that a balanced budget amendment is imperative.

We believe also that Federal taxpayers have a right to fundamental and fair tax reform. My good friend from Tennessee mentioned earlier that on January 1, 2011, 1/1/11, that this new majority is destined for the largest tax increase in the history of this Nation. We believe that that's wrong. We believe that the manner in which this Federal Government gains revenue stifles entrepreneurship, stifles vision, hurts dreams, harms success, says to folks who are working hard out there across this Nation, Don't do that. Don't work hard. That's not what you want to do, because if you do that, we will just take more of your money. That is not the America I dream about and I believe in. So we believe that fundamental and fair tax reform is imperative.

And finally, Madam Speaker, the Taxpayer Bill of Rights says that in order to increase taxes in this body, that we must have a supermajority. We

must have more than just 50 percent plus one. We must convince a supermajority, a vast number of the individuals who serve in this body from all across this Nation, that a tax increase is absolutely necessary. It is one of the provisions that we had in place for the last 12 years, from 1994 to 2006. It's one of the things that was changed on the very first day of this new Congress, that a supermajority was no longer required. It is one of the reasons, Madam Speaker, why there was no significant tax increase over the last 12 years. One of the reasons, Madam Speaker, that we've seen a significant increase in economic productivity across this Nation over the last 4 years is because of appropriate tax decreases and not allowing increases by just a slim majority.

So, Madam Speaker, I am honored to come to the floor this afternoon and to share an American value, American vision that talks about positive things about our Nation and congratulates the men and women around this Nation who are working hard, who are trying to earn for their families and save for their retirement, who are trying to contribute to their own American Dream.

I believe that it is an incredible honor to serve in this United States House of Representatives. I believe it is incumbent on every single Member of this House to respect and value the hard work that each and every American performs each and every single day, regardless of the job that they're doing. Every single job has merit and worth and is deserving of our respect. And one of the ways that we ought to respect it is to allow men and women across this Nation to keep more of their hard-earned money and to be responsible with the spending that we perform here at the Federal level.

So I am honored to have presented that American vision and that American value to my colleagues today. Madam Speaker, I appreciate that opportunity.

I yield back the balance of my time.

BLUE DOG COALITION DEFICITS AND DEBT BACKGROUND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Madam Speaker, this evening, as most Tuesday evenings, I rise on behalf of the 43 member strong, fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition. We are 43 fiscally conservative Democrats that are committed to restoring common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government. We are not from one particular region of the country. Members of the Blue Dog Coalition stretch from California and Utah to New York, and we are united in trying to restore fiscal sanity to our Nation's government.

Why? Because today, the U.S. national debt is \$8,821,563,738,020. And I ran out of room, but right here it should say 12 cents. And for every man, woman and child in America, your share of the national debt is \$29,225.95. It is what we refer to as the debt tax, d-e-b-t, which is one tax that cannot be cut; it cannot go away until we get our Nation's fiscal house in order.

It is hard now to believe, but from 1998 to 2001, we had a balanced budget in this country of ours. And now, under the past 6 years of Republican rule, with the Republicans controlling the White House, the House and the Senate, after 6 years we've got the largest debt ever in our Nation's history and the largest deficit ever in our Nation's history. In fiscal year 2004, it was \$568 billion. In fiscal year 2005, it was \$493.6 billion. In fiscal year 2006 it was \$434 billion. Fiscal year 2006 it was \$247 billion, and the projected deficit for fiscal year 2007 is \$172 billion, but not really. The projected deficit for fiscal year 2007 is \$357 billion. When they tell you it's only \$172 billion, they're not counting the money they're borrowing from the Social Security trust fund.

When I first came to Congress in 2001, the first bill I wrote was a bill to tell the politicians in Washington to keep their hands off the Social Security trust fund. The Republican leadership refused to give me a hearing or a vote on that bill, and now we know why, because they are using that money to fund our debt. \$357 billion deficit projected for fiscal year 2007, and much of that is coming, about half of that is coming from the Social Security trust fund. Where is the rest of it coming from? It's coming from foreigners. In fact, this administration has borrowed more money from foreigners in the past 6 years than the previous 42 Presidents combined. Let me repeat that. This administration has borrowed more money from foreigners in the past 6 years than the previous 42 Presidents combined. My good friend and a founder of the Blue Dogs, JOHN TANNER, put it best when he said, If China decides to invade Taiwan, we will have to borrow more money from China to defend Taiwan.

David Letterman has a top 10 list, and we've got one, too. The U.S. is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign lenders. Foreign lenders currently hold a total of about \$2.199 trillion of our public debt. Compare this to only \$623.3 billion in foreign holdings back in 1993. Again, this administration in the past 6 years has borrowed more money from foreign central banks and foreign investors than the previous 42 Presidents combined.

Japan, \$637.4 billion. The United States of America has borrowed \$346.5 billion from China. The United Kingdom, \$223.5 billion. OPEC, yes OPEC, and we wonder why gasoline is approaching three bucks a gallon. Our Nation has borrowed \$97.1 billion from OPEC to fund tax cuts in this country for folks earning over \$400,000 a year.

Korea, \$67.7 billion. Taiwan, \$63.2 billion. The Caribbean banking centers, \$63.6 billion. Hong Kong, \$51 billion. Germany, \$52.1 billion. And rounding out the top 10 list, and this will surprise some folks, the United States of America's 10th largest loanee to our government is the Government of Mexico and investors in Mexico. Mexico, investors have loaned the United States of America \$38.2 billion. That's right, the United States of America has borrowed \$38.2 billion from Mexico. And that rounds out the top 10 list of the foreign countries that our Nation is borrowing money from.

We believe this is very critical to our Nation's security. That is why we are trying to restore fiscal discipline and common sense to our Nation's government, put an end to these massive debts and massive deficits. Our Nation is borrowing a billion dollars a day, but before we borrow a billion dollars a day, we're going to spend half a billion paying interest on a debt we've already got. And that's a half a billion that can't go for Social Security, it can't go for health care, it can't go for new roads and fixing roads and infrastructure. It can't go for education, it can't go for homeland security, and it cannot go for veterans benefits. Why? Because we are spending that money, a half a billion dollars a day, simply paying interest on the debt we've already got before we increase it a billion dollars today. I think we need that half a bill to invest in the best and most advanced technology out there when it comes to bullet-proof vests to protect our men and women in uniform, to give them the best and most advanced equipment they need.

I've got a father, John Grant, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, that's very concerned about his son going back for a second tour of duty in Iraq and not having the most advanced body armor that's on the market today. A half a billion a day going to pay interest on the national debt, how many modern, state-of-the-art body armor vests could we buy with just the amount of money we're spending today paying interest on the national debt?

I am joined this evening by a number of fellow Blue Dogs, and I am grateful they have come down to spend some time with me on the House floor this evening.

At this time I would like to yield to a fellow Blue Dog, someone that's very active on the Blue Dog Coalition, someone that serves on the Armed Services Committee, among other important committees, and that is my friend from neighboring Oklahoma, DAN BOREN.

Mr. BOREN. Thank you. My colleague from Arkansas, Mr. ROSS, is a great leader for us on the Blue Dog Coalition. I am now in my second term, and I tell you there is no better organization than the Blue Dog Coalition.

When I was elected, and actually when I was running for Congress, I was able to sit down with a lot of the Blue

Dog members. We had a lot of common interests, and one of those was fiscal responsibility.

Many of us that serve in Congress are former members of State legislatures. I can tell you, I can remember being a freshman State legislator and dealing with a State budget. When I was elected, we had a \$700 million shortfall. That doesn't sound like big numbers here in Washington, DC, but they're big numbers in Oklahoma. And we were able to balance our budget because we basically had an amendment to our State constitution saying you will balance that budget. You're going to have to cut services; you're going to have to do something to rein in that spending. In Washington we don't have that. That's why it is so important that we have groups like the Blue Dogs who are focused on fiscal responsibility.

I can tell you, since this Democratic majority has taken hold, the Blue Dogs have been a key player in making sure that we have things like the PAYGO rules, PAYGO rules that make sure that whenever there is a new government program, we find a way to pay for it. We don't just write a hot check for it. So that is why I am proud to be a member.

My friend from Arkansas has been on this floor many, many times talking about the waste, fraud and abuse. And we will make sure that in this defense authorization bill we cut out any unwarranted spending that is not going to the warfighter. That is something that I have been working very hard with Chairman SKELTON on each and every day, and I appreciate his leadership. We've got many Blue Dogs on the Armed Services Committee, and we are going to keep working to make sure that we spend those tax dollars wisely.

□ 1730

We are joined also by our friend here, a new member who sits actually next to me on the Armed Services Committee, Mr. BRAD ELLSWORTH from Indiana. I would like to turn it over to him for any of his thoughts on the Blue Dogs or what is going on in the defense authorization bill or any other topics he wants to discuss.

Mr. ELLSWORTH. Madam Speaker, it is an honor for me to join you and the members of the Blue Dog Coalition in their mission to bring fiscal responsibility back to this House.

As my friend from Oklahoma said, I am a new member. I have been up here approximately 5 months now, so it is easy for me to remember what the people of the Eighth District of Indiana said, their marching orders when they sent me here and elected me to the people's House. They told me to stay honest. They told me, don't let Washington change you. They said, in fact, you need to go and change the way Washington works. And they said "spend my money wisely."

They have probably seen Mr. ROSS on TV and saw the poster that showed that every person in this country, their

portion of the national debt was \$29,000, and it recently had to be added to. Over \$29,000. Every man, woman, child, living person in this country, owes \$29,000 of that debt. That is too much. Why are we strapping our children and grandchildren with that kind of debt?

The people in Indiana are pretty smart. Nobody likes taxes, but they realize that taxes are a necessary, I might go as far and say, evil, if they want the services that the government provides. So they don't mind paying those taxes if they know that their Congress people are spending those taxes wisely.

So when they hear about "bridges to nowhere" and fish museums and teapot museums in North Carolina, or maybe more serious than that, things like \$38 million worth of weapons in Iraq and Afghanistan that have gone on the missing-in-action list, weapons that probably have fallen into our enemy's hands, or \$9 billion in \$100 bills on pallets that is gone. It is missing, and our great country, with all of our accounting, cannot account for \$9 billion in cash that has gone over there on skids.

That is not what the people of Indiana expect of this Congress. It is not what they expect of me, and I don't think they will tolerate it.

That is why when I came to Congress, when I heard about the Blue Dog Coalition, the Blue Dog Caucus, that it was a pretty easy group to join. When I checked on them, and I assume they checked on me, we had those same values and ideals. We were fiscally conservative. We want to spend the people's money wisely. We weren't going to waste it. We actually worked to balance the budget, that we wouldn't spend money we didn't have.

I have a credit card. Probably most people in the audience here, Madam Speaker, you may have a credit card, I am sure. But I don't run up those totals to the amounts that our country has run up, into foreign countries. My wife and I work hard. We charge things, and then we pay off that card. That is what the people expect us to do here.

So it is going to take tough decisions. It is going to take the tough calls. But we have got that. A group of 43 have that internal fortitude to put those tough decisions on the front. The people understand that. They will let us do that, that we will make wise decisions with their money.

So I stand here tonight, not only in the Armed Services Committee, but in every committee, whether it is Agriculture, Small Business, Armed Services, no matter what the committee is, this Congress, the people's House, has a responsibility to spend their money wisely. I pledge to do that, I know the Blue Dogs pledge to do that, and I think the other 434 Members of Congress need to do that, too.

With that, I yield back to the gentleman from Arkansas.

Mr. ROSS. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Indiana, a new

member of the fiscally conservative, Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, Mr. ELLSWORTH, for joining us for the discussion this evening here on the House floor, as we are every Tuesday night, here talking about restoring fiscal sanity to our national government.

Public opinion polls indicate that the American people really aren't concerned about the debt, which is approaching \$9 trillion. But I am here to make the case that every one of us in America should be concerned about the national debt, because despite what some people may believe, despite what the Republicans have believed for the past 6 years, money does not grow on trees in Washington, DC, and we have got to begin to run this government the way that I can assure you Holly Ross makes sure that we run the Ross household in Prescott, Arkansas, and that is living within our means.

We cannot continue to borrow \$1 billion a day. We cannot continue to spend half a billion dollars a day paying interest on the debt we have already got.

Why should it matter to every American? Look at this chart right here. Interest payments on the debt dwarf other priorities. For example, in the red you can see the amount of money we are spending of your tax money, Madam Speaker, paying interest on the national debt. You compare that to education in the light blue, compare it to homeland security in the green, compare it to veterans benefits in the blue.

You can see where the priorities lay with this administration for the past 6 years. The majority of our money is being spent paying interest on the national debts, not going to educate our children, not going to keep our homeland safe, not going to fund veterans healthcare.

At this time I yield to the gentleman from Georgia, a fellow Blue Dog member, Mr. SCOTT.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Thank you very much, Mr. ROSS. As always, it is indeed a pleasure to be with you on this occasion.

I want to talk about two areas, the debt, and, of course the big elephant in the room which all of America is concerned about, the situation in Iraq and Iraq accountability.

I happen to serve on the Financial Services Committee and on the Foreign Affairs Committee, so in terms of foreign policy and in terms of our finances, those are the two major critical cross-sections we are in at this point.

Concerning the debt, it is very important that we point out, Mr. ROSS, that the fastest growing area in our budget is the interest that we are paying on this debt, which is more than what we are spending combined for education, the environment and for veterans affairs.

As we segue that into our international situation, when you look at the debt that we have gotten into as a

result of the carelessness and the ineffective, inefficient foreign policy as it relates to our debt; for example, under this President and under this previous Republican-controlled Congress, this country has borrowed more money from foreign governments than all of the preceding past Presidents have done since 1789, since the foundation of this country. It has placed us in a very perilous position. And we are fighting this war in Iraq and Afghanistan on borrowed money that our children will have to pay back and the children of our soldiers will have to pay back.

Mr. ROSS, what is on the minds of the American people is accountability in Iraq. It is very important that we mention two major bills that we are moving in that direction. First is our own troop readiness and Iraqi accountability bill that passed this House, the basic framework of which after the President vetoed the first go around is now in the bill we passed last week, and it is in the conference report that we hope we will be sending back. It is important that the American people understand what the Democrats have put forward in this measure.

Our other bill is the Accountability Act, in terms of financial accountability, that we in the Blue Dog Coalition of Democrats have put forward to bring some fiscal responsibility and soundness and transparency to the moneys that we are spending in Iraq and Afghanistan. We know about the Halliburtons, we know about all the war profiteering. We hear about that in the news accounts.

It is our bill that we are pushing forward that will give some transparency and accountability. Two important facts that I think the American people need to know about that bill is that, one, it will require that the Inspector General from both the Defense Department over at the Pentagon, will have to come before this Congress quarterly to explain and to account for the moneys that are spent on that basis, as well as the Inspector General from the rebuilding program in Iraq, where so much loss of funds, unaccountability, outright stealing and theft is going on of the taxpayers' money. So we are bringing accountability to that.

But we also have got to do more, and that is what is contained in the conference report that we are sending to the President. Not only do we have benchmarks, but there must be accountability to the Iraqi people. They have this opportunity and they must step up to the plate to assume their end of the bargain. There is a government in place, and the benchmarks we have put in, there is no better way to do that.

Now, Mr. ROSS, I think much has been said about Congress and the role that we have to play in foreign policy. Unfortunately, this President has said time and time again that he is in control of foreign policy; that he is the Commander in Chief, and that the Congress is just here to do pretty much as

he wants us to do. And for 5 years, for the first 5 years, that happened, where this Congress just rolled over and gave the President everything that he wants.

When we had that change in November and the people went to the polls to put Democrats in charge, they wanted to see a change in direction, and the Democrats are giving the change in direction in the bills that we have sent forward to the President.

You talk about fiscal accountability. Yes, indeed, we have that in there. We have put more money in this budget for our troops, \$4 billion more, than the President has asked for. But it is so important also that we have accountability when the money gets over, to make sure that the Iraqi people understand, we don't have an endless supply of money to go down over into Iraq, and most certainly we do not have an endless supply of the precious blood and the lives of our soldiers to continually be going down the pike in the Iraqi situation. The American people are saying this situation has to end. We must get our men and women in uniform out of the middle of the crosshairs of what is a civil war.

Madam Speaker, we realize that we are in this because of mistakes. More importantly, Mr. ROSS, when you talk about accountability, it is important that we realize now that not only have mistakes been made, but we got into Iraq based on not just bad intelligence, but warped intelligence, and we got in there on deceit and lies. All of that is there now.

It is very important for us if we want to effectively be able to determine how to get out of Iraq, we must be honest about how we got into Iraq. So it is very important that we do that.

The American patience is running out on those two measures of Iraqi accountability, in terms of the money we are spending, in terms of the benchmarks we have put into this effort, and for the transparency that we put in our bill. We, as Democrats, are being very responsive.

We do have security in that region. We are not going to abandon our troops, but we are going to get them out of the crosshairs of this civil war and get into a position of containment. That is the direction that we have to go in as we formulate a new, much more effective foreign policy in the Middle East.

Mr. ROSS. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia for his work with the Blue Dog Coalition, 43 of us, fiscally conservative Democrats. I welcome the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. SCOTT, to remain on the floor with me, if time will permit for him, for a discussion more in depth over the next 40 minutes as we talk about restoring not only fiscal sanity, but also accountability to our government, not only here at home but to the money being spent in Iraq.

We all support our troops, Democrats and Republicans alike. Up until now,

the President would have you believe that we are sending \$12 million an hour to Iraq, and if you question how any of it is being spent, he would tell you you are unpatriotic.

Well, the Blue Dogs have said enough is enough. It is time to demand accountability for how that money is being spent, to ensure it is being spent to provide the very best equipment and the best of the best for our brave men and women in uniform serving us abroad today, not only in Iraq but also Afghanistan.

I am joined this evening by the gentleman from North Dakota, Mr. EARL POMEROY, and a fellow Blue Dog member. Welcome.

Mr. POMEROY. Thank you very much for allowing me to participate in this Special Order. I want to congratulate you and all who have impacted the national defense authorization bill we will be voting on towards the end of the week.

You know, the principles of sound budgeting have got to apply to the administration of our government, and that means all facets of our government. We have had leadership at the White House that has basically said we can have a war, and we are going to have it off budget. We don't have to account for it in terms of our efforts toward reaching a balanced budget, our efforts in terms of reducing the deficit. We are going to have it off budget.

□ 1745

All it means is our kids are picking up every nickel of this war, as it goes straight on the national debt. That is why I appreciate the principles advanced by the Blue Dogs in H. Res. 97, the Operation Iraqi Freedom Cost Accountability Act, and I applaud you and all who worked so hard to get major portions of it included in the Defense Authorization Act.

The four significant provisions of the bill: transparency in how the war funds are being spent. This isn't a black-box proposition. The money is appropriated; the money flows. Where does it flow?

I believe we have at the rate of \$2 billion per-week burn rate, we are entitled to know. We are entitled to know in much greater detail than we have had before. The Blue Dogs would go so far as to have a Truman Commission looking at war profiteering.

If in the depths of World War II, the face-down with Hitler, we could recognize that there were inappropriate funds being spent and worked to get a handle around them, as Senator Truman led with his committee, certainly the same holds true with the war on terror and with Operation Iraqi Freedom.

There is a book that I recommend and bring to your attention, "Imperial Life in the Emerald City." It is an outstanding inside account of the administration of the Green Zone in the early days after the conflict and into this postwar period in Iraq. It will raise in

your mind, as it has raised in mine, any number of deep and troubling questions about how this whole matter has been administered, and that goes to war contracting, and that means we need to take a thorough look at all of that.

Part three of H. Res. 97, running the future funding of this war through the regular appropriations process, a principle adopted now both in the budget and the Defense Authorization Act, and the fourth essential component of this bill, moving greater Iraqi responsibility for their policing and security.

Now we have a unanimous vote of the Armed Services Committee with the defense authorization bill, and I believe the Blue Dogs can be very happy that the principle of funding this war through the normal appropriations process and greater transparency in how the funds are spent will be the policy of this House, a policy adopted I am happy to say with bipartisan measures.

The essential management goals for this war will have to be established by the Department of Defense, and the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction will have a much greater say in bringing information on the expenditure of these dollars to this body. There have been efforts, frankly, to hamstring the Inspector General. We make clear in this legislation that the Inspector General's authority goes towards reconstruction funding regardless of the source or the fiscal year. We need to expand our efforts to get a handle on how in the world we have spent to date nearly \$400 billion, and the tab flowing just as fast as ever.

I think that this represents an important Blue Dog accomplishment. I look forward to voting on the defense authorization bill. Rather than take further time, I ask that JIM MARSHALL, a member of the Ranger Hall of Fame, a member of the defense authorization committee, be one that might further expand in this area. Obviously, his credentials are extremely well established.

I would just conclude by saying that the Blue Dogs have stood for accounting principles and solid budgeting in the administration of this war, and we have prevailed with the bill coming out of the Armed Services Committee.

Mr. ROSS. I thank Mr. POMEROY for his active participation within the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition and for his insight this evening.

The gentleman is referring to H. Res. 97, which is the Blue Dog bill providing for Operation Iraqi Freedom Cost Accountability; and today, Chairman SKELTON, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, announced that key provisions of that bill demanding accountability on how your tax money is being spent in Iraq, Madam Speaker, will be included in the defense authorization bill that is scheduled to come to the floor.

A leader within the Armed Services Committee, someone who is a member of the Ranger Hall of Fame, who served

our country in the Vietnam War, Mr. MARSHALL, is here, and I yield to you at this time.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. ROSS, you are wonderful to do these hour-long Blue Dog sessions here to give people an idea what Blue Dogs are all about as far as fiscal responsibility is concerned.

I think you and Mr. POMEROY give me a little too much credit. If you label somebody a Ranger, it reminds me of the joke about the Ranger library down in Eglin Air Force Base having burned down. That was the bad news. The good news was that both books were already colored in. We don't expect our Rangers to be particularly good at math or education subjects, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out there has been an awful lot of waste in Iraq. It is not just waste on our side; we excessively rely upon contractors. I think we have moved too far in that direction, and we limit our capacity within our own military forces to provide services that ought to be provided by military folks and could be provided by military folks at a much lesser expense to the taxpayer.

Spending less, stretching your dollars means you are going to be more effective at whatever you are doing, and that includes an effort like Iraq. I think we have inappropriately moved too far in the direction of relying upon contractors. That is one thing. The other place where we have seen dramatic waste is on the Iraqi side.

The American taxpayers and the American people with their sons and their daughters who are in this war and in harm's way at risk of being killed or being severely harmed expect that the Iraqi people and the Iraqi Government will step up and do its part. We all know that this is something that cannot be won by an American conventional force. We are not simply going to go in and raze whole villages to force people to comply with us and our view of the way things ought to be.

The local population has to deal with the security situation in Iraq. We can help and we must help or they will be unsuccessful, but we can't succeed without them.

Our Iraq accountability legislation specifically provides that further assistance and support to the Iraqi people should be conditioned upon the Iraqi Government stepping up and meeting its share of the partnership. If the Iraqi people choose to do that, and obviously they have problems among themselves, far greater problems than Democrats and Republicans have here in the United States House of Representatives, and we often have a hard time coming together here in the House of Representatives, so it is not surprising that Sunni and Shiite and Kurds in Iraq are having a similarly difficult time, a more difficult time coming together and reconciling with one another so they can appropriately organize to address the internal security threats that they face. We can't force

them to reconcile. We can't force them to build the institutions that they need to spend their oil money effectively and addressing the security threat. We can't force them to address the security threat.

So in the partnership here in many ways we can help them, but there are things they must be doing. And as part of the financial accountability picture that Blue Dogs feel so strongly about, we have to add accountability of our partners. The Iraqi people are our partners. The Iraqi Government is our partner, and our partners need to be accountable for their side of the deal here or this is not going to come out well for the Iraqi people, the Middle East, or the United States.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my opinion with regard to that particular issue. I appreciate what the Blue Dogs do as far as debt is concerned and highlighting something our country should be very concerned about.

They say that if there is a moral or ethical obligation one generation has to the next generation, it is to leave the world in at least as good a state as that generation found it when we pass it to the next generation. What we ought to be trying to do is make it a better world; and in so many different ways this generation is failing that ethical or moral responsibility to the next generation, and the amount of debt that we are adding to their shoulders is one of those ways.

Mr. ROSS, I appreciate what you do for the Blue Dogs and for the Congress of the United States.

Mr. ROSS, I appreciate the gentleman and his leadership within the Blue Dog Coalition and his work on the House Armed Services Committee and for his insight this evening.

We all support our troops, Republicans and Democrats alike. As members of the Blue Dog Coalition, we want accountability for how your tax money is being spent. In 2001 and 2002, \$2.5 billion was being spent in Iraq. In 2003, \$51 billion. In 2004, \$77.3 billion. In 2005, \$87.3 billion. In 2006, \$100.4 billion. And 2007 to date, \$60 billion, for a total of \$378.5 billion.

We are currently spending about \$10 billion a month, about \$2.5 billion a week. You do the math. It is about \$12 million an hour of your tax money we are sending to Iraq. What are they doing with it? Number one, they ought to be ensuring that our brave men and women in uniform get the best body armor available to them. There are reports out that indicate maybe that is not exactly the case.

This was brought to my attention by John Grant from Percy, Arkansas, just outside of Hot Springs, in Garland County. His son is getting ready to go back for a second tour of duty. He visited a National Guard Armory where he actually saw body armor that was stamped "Fragile, Handle With Care." It is time we did right by our brave men and women in uniform and provide them with the resources they need.

The Blue Dogs have written a bill with the help of Captain PATRICK MURPHY, a veteran of the Iraq war and fellow Blue Dog member, and JANE HARMAN, former ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, among others, and our bill demands accountability on how our tax money, your tax money, is being spent in Iraq.

One of the reasons that we decided to do this bill was because of reports like this: Washington Post, Monday, April 30, a story by Dana Hedgpeth, entitled, "U.S. Rebuilding in Iraq is Missing Key Goals, Report Finds." Less than a third of Iraq's 3.5 million students attend class. In the medical field, for example, only 15 of 141 primary health care centers have been completed, and only eight of those are open to the public. The list goes on, and we will talk more about this in a little bit.

At this time I yield to a former co-chair of the Blue Dogs and an active member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition, the gentleman from Utah (Mr. MATHESON).

Mr. MATHESON. Well, I thank my colleague from Arkansas for conducting this Special Order tonight. That list, that article that you just were referring to is not a one-time deal. I think we all have a sense after over 4 years of the Iraqi operation having taken place, I think we have all heard stories, and those news articles seem to come out more and more often where money has been spent and we haven't gotten result in terms of rebuilding the infrastructure. That is a cause of concern and that is one of the motivations behind the Blue Dogs coming together with legislation in this Congress called the Operation Iraqi Freedom Cost Accountability Act.

The Blue Dogs have come up with this bill which has been given the number H. Res. 97, and I want to take a brief moment to walk through what this legislation does.

Now, quite frankly, before we go through the specifics, I should say it puts forth tangible and commonsense proposals to ensure future transparency and the accountability in the funding of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This is a first step. There is more we probably need to do, but this is an important first step to make sure that resources are getting to our troops in the field in a reasonable manner.

There are four crucial points in this legislation demanding for fiscal accountability in Iraq.

First, it calls for transparency on how Iraq war funds are spent.

Second, it calls for the creation of a Truman Commission to investigate the awarding of contracts.

And, third, it calls for the need to fund the Iraqi war through the normal appropriations process and not through emergency supplemental appropriations processes.

Fourth, it calls for using American resources to improve the Iraqi assumption of internal policing operations.

Now, the resolution also calls for the Iraqi Government and its people to

progress towards full responsibility for internal policing of the country because ultimately that is where we need to go.

Now recently, and I know other speakers have mentioned this, a significant accomplishment took place in terms of the Blue Dogs working with the Armed Services Committee to include key provisions of the Blue Dog accountability legislation in the Department of Defense authorization bill that we are going to be voting on here in the House of Representatives later on this week.

□ 1800

In doing so, I think it's an important first step toward ensuring greater fiscal transparency in the funding of the war in Iraq.

The American people deserve to know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely and that our troops have the resources they need to succeed. The Blue Dogs are committed to passing legislation that accomplishes that goal.

Now, members of the Blue Dog Coalition also believe strongly that funding requests should come through the normal appropriations process, as I said, rather than through these multiple emergency supplemental requests. Let's make it part of our overall budget so we can plan accordingly.

I think that again with the Defense authorization bill coming up this week and with key components of the Blue Dog legislation included in that bill, I think that's a significant step forward for this country. I am proud that the Blue Dogs were able to play an important role in moving this legislation forward.

Mr. ROSS, I thank the gentleman from Utah, and the gentleman's right, the Blue Dog Coalition, we want to thank Chairman SKELTON for including key provisions of our bill, H. Res. 97, in the Defense authorization bill.

H. Res. 97 was previously introduced by Blue Dog members and calls for transparency in how Iraq War funds are spent. Specifically, the Defense authorization bill addresses the lack of oversight and accountability in the war by requiring that the Government Accountability Office, commonly referred to as the GAO, report every 6 months on the handling of contracts in Iraq.

In addition, Blue Dog members applauded the inclusion of measures in the Defense authorization bill which establish essential management goals for the Department of Defense and expand the authority of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction to include all reconstruction funding, regardless of source or fiscal year.

Again, we're all about providing the funding our troops need. We want to make sure that funding gets to them and that this administration's accountable for it and that the Iraqi people are accountable for how the money is being spent that we send to them.

Mr. Speaker, if you have got any comments or questions or concerns for

us, you can e-mail us at bluedogs@mail.house.gov. Again, that's bluedogs@mail.house.gov.

I yield to my fellow Blue Dog member all the way from California (Mr. COSTA).

Mr. COSTA. Madam Speaker, I thank very much Congressman ROSS, the gentleman from Arkansas, who does an excellent job each week in helping convey the message of the Blue Dogs, the fiscally conservative Democrats who are focused on accountability, not just at home but abroad as well.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to once again echo strong support for the Blue Dog Accountability War Act, and I, too, am pleased that Congressman SKELTON, because of his focus and his desire to see the same sort of accountability that I think all Americans want to see, this is a bipartisan issue, chose to include provisions of the Blue Dog War Accountability Act within the new authorization for Defense.

Four years ago, we all remember very clearly when this war effort was brought to America. We were told that 4 years ago it would cost \$60 billion and that the oil revenue from Iraq, which has tremendous reserves, would go to pay for the reconstruction. I think many Americans thought that that might be a reasonable price to pay, notwithstanding the fact that you can never, ever put a price on the cost of American lives that have been lost nor those that have been injured. Nonetheless, we were told that 4 years ago in monetary costs, it would be \$60 billion and the oil revenues would go to pay for the reconstruction costs.

Many of you saw the reports this week by a number of press agencies that indicated over the last 2 years billions and billions of dollars have been lost from revenues from the Iraqi oil reserves, but while it was a new story this week, it comes as no surprise to many of us who have been briefed in Congress.

I was in Iraq last May, spent time in Mosul, city of Mosul, with a number of our commanders. As we were getting our briefings, as all congressional delegations receive when you go to Iraq, we were told of the problems of getting the oil from the oil field, from the wellheads to refinery because there's only one, and then getting the refined products to where the Iraqis could use the gasoline and the other oil products. They told us as recently as a year ago that every step of the way from when the oil was taken out of the wellhead, put in the truck, on the truck, mind you, because you can't use pipelines because the insurgents keep blowing the pipelines up, that every step of the way, every province, there is graft, there is corruption, there's other types of lost revenue, and those moneys go too often into the hands of these same insurgents that are battling our troops, making side profits off the revenue that was supposed to go to reconstruction, going to pay for insurgents and for bombs that come in the form of

IEDs, that end up killing and maiming so many of our American men and women who are trying to fight this battle on behalf of the Iraqis.

So this is well-known, and yet 2 years as we look at the problems with trying to get this oil out of the ground and to the refineries, we still have made little progress in terms of eliminating that graft and corruption that currently takes place or the profits from that graft and corruption that go into the hands of the insurgents.

And yes, unfortunately, the oil revenues today are still at or below the levels during pre-Saddam Hussein years when, in fact, there were restrictions on the amount of oil they could drill. That's how much progress unfortunately we have not made in the 4 years that we've been engaged in this effort.

The fiscal accountability under the Blue Dog War Act for this effort, as it's being included in other aspects of our budget, are critical. The reforms the Americans expected here at home, they're the reforms that Americans expect on a bipartisan basis as we try to change the direction and the course of this war in Iraq.

Let me conclude by saying that it's important that we keep our eyes focused on the situation at hand. Many of us have had briefings on a weekly basis with the top generals who are engaged in this effort trying to implement this surge. Just last week in speaking with one of those generals, I told him, I said, you know, we're doubtful on the surge, many of us, not because we don't think American men and women are successful; we know that they will do the absolute best job possible, but we're doubtful on the credibility of the leadership of this administration to effectively carry out what they say, and that's a loss of confidence. If this were a parliamentary system, there would be a vote of no confidence after all that has transpired over the last 4 years.

Having said that, I, like most Americans, hope that this surge is successful, for all the right reasons, for all the right reasons, but let me tell you tonight what I told the American general last week. If this surge by this summer is not successful, I hope you will tell the Congress and the American public that it's not working. He responded in the affirmative that he would respond by August on whether or not this was working or not. So I told the general, I said I hope it's successful, but I hope if it's not, you will tell us that it is not and that currently you are engaged in an effort that looks at a plan B. As I told Secretary of State that we needed to be thinking about doing in February of this year, a plan B that would protect our men and women who are at the front lines, look at protecting the borders between Iraq and Iran and Syria, look at redeployment, looking at beefing up our efforts in Afghanistan, in a way that protects our interests in the Middle East but quits trying to convince ourselves that if we want

democracy more than the Iraqis it will happen.

At the end of the day, Iraq will have to stand up for itself and indicate that they want to make a success out of this effort of democracy.

So I want to yield back to my colleagues and I thank my friend, the gentleman from Arkansas, for providing this opportunity for fellow Blue Dogs to come and talk about why we are so concerned that, in fact, a new day has come and why we have to make new changes in direction that will fit the accountability of American men and women, that American taxpayers and that most importantly our American soldiers demand and deserve.

Mr. ROSS. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California, and as we have been discussing this hour, Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 97 demands accountability for how the money is being spent in Iraq.

We all support our brave men and women in uniform. We all support our troops. We are all Americans first and foremost, but just as when a small town in America receives a grant they must be held accountable for how that grant money is spent, so should the Iraqi government.

Again, Washington Post, Monday, April 30, by Dana Hedgpeth, entitled U.S. Rebuilding in Iraq Is Missing Key Goals, Report Finds. "Before the U.S.-led invasion, Iraq's power system produced 4,500 megawatts a day with an aging infrastructure in which 85 percent of power plants were at least 20 years old, the report said. Reconstruction officials initially hoped to increase daily output to 6,750 megawatts by the summer of 2004, a target later lowered to 6,000 megawatts. But in the most recent quarter, Iraq generated only 3,832 megawatts a day."

What does that mean? The story goes on to say, "The shortage was particularly acute in Baghdad. Before the war, the city received an average of 16 to 24 hours of power a day. Last spring, Baghdad averaged 8 hours of electricity a day." That was last spring. "This year, during the last week of March, the city received only 6.5 hours of electricity a day. The rest of the country, however, received an average of 14 hours of power a day."

At this time, I yield to the gentleman that helped write H. Res. 97, which is of course the Blue Dog bill, to provide for Operation Iraqi Freedom cost accountability, to provide an accounting for how this \$12 million an hour of your tax money is being spent in Iraq, the gentleman who helped write the bill, an active member of the Blue Dog Coalition, the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMPSON).

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Madam Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Arkansas, and I thank the gentleman from Arkansas and I appreciate your leadership on this issue.

I don't come to the floor often on Special Orders, but I think today this issue is so critically important not

only for the American taxpayers but for the men and women who are serving so bravely in Iraq, and this is such a long overdue issue, as the gentleman mentioned, I helped write this bill but this came about after two Congresses of my own bill, the Iraq War Funding Accountability Act, that in the last Congress, as you know, was a Blue Dog-endorsed measure. That was an attempt to bring about accountability in Iraq in regard to the moneys that are spent by contractors in the reconstruction areas taking place in Iraq.

Unfortunately, we were not allowed under the last Congress or the last majority to bring this measure forward so we could debate it, so we could discuss it, so we could vote on it. But fortunately, with the new leadership in Congress, this has become an issue that has not only been discussed and debated but an issue that is going to be included in the bill that we have before us this week. And it's just so long overdue on the part of the American taxpayers and the men and women who are serving who, because this money is misspent, misdirected, sometimes lost, are going without the equipment that they need.

Every Member in this House has heard from family members and friends about their loved ones serving in Iraq who require supplies purchased by family members and friends and sent to them, everything from boots to protective gear, to the proper sunglasses, to supplies. It's absolutely inappropriate, and as long as we continue to misappropriate money and allow this to fall into the area of waste, fraud and abuse, and in sometimes criminal neglect or criminal negligence, this issue is only going to be exacerbated and the stories are just far too numerous.

We've heard the little stories that, in fact, some of these contractors are selling soda pop at \$45 a case to the men and women who are serving in Iraq to the same contractors who are charging \$100 to do a 15-pound bag of laundry, to the bigger issue, such as trucks, trucks that are burned in place because there's minor repair problems needed, to even bigger issues such as pallets of money, I think it was \$12 billion that just disappeared in Iraq. And we have been trying to get a handle on this for a long time, and every effort that we have made has been short-stopped in this Congress, and finally, we are going to be able to get it out.

Mr. Speaker, I have here a Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction Report. This is a report that's issued quarterly to Congress.

□ 1815

It tells us very, very little about what's happening. It will tell us by contractor name how much we are obligated to them. It will tell us by contractor name how much they have expended. It will tell us by contractor name the percentage of increase in these expenditures, but it doesn't tell us how the contract was let, why the

contract was necessary, and, if, in fact, the work being done was, in fact, completed.

This report represents a snapshot from 30,000 feet, no attempt at all to drill down and find the answers that the taxpayers and the servicemembers deserve. I have another report here about the construction by a contractor of the Baghdad police academy, obviously built in Baghdad. These pictures are worth 1,000 words. They show the fact that the work was done, shoddy workmanship. They show, in fact, that the supplies that were used by these contractors were inappropriate supplies, faulty, substandard supplies. This isn't pointed out in the quarterly report.

These are the things that we need to know, and I am just proud to be a member of the Blue Dogs who exist for one reason and one reason only, the one common thread that runs through the entire Blue Dog organization, and that's fiscal responsibility. It's fiscally irresponsible to continue to ignore these very real problems. It's fiscally improper to adopt this measure, to insist on accountability by those who are being paid just gross sums of money to do, in some instances, inappropriate, ineffective, substandard work.

I thank the gentleman from Arkansas for yielding, and I appreciate your leadership in helping get this measure signed into law and bringing accountability to these outrageous incidents that are taking place in Iraq today.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from California for his work within the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition to write and craft this Iraq war accountability bill known as House Resolution 97.

In the remaining 3 minutes or so we have left, I am going to yield to my friend, fellow Blue Dog member from the State of Georgia, Mr. DAVID SCOTT.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Thank you, Mr. ROSS.

I will try to sum up what we have done this evening. It is very important, as the American people have followed this process, have seen us with the legislative process at work, not only in terms of debating the issue, but they have also witnessed how we are putting this, hopefully, this final piece together that the President will sign.

First of all, just to wrap up, we have made concessions with the President on the issues that he was concerned about. The timelines, have, indeed, been removed. Those were his major objections on it. So we have compromised on that point.

But we also had, then, accountability, and that's what the American people want. They want to make sure that we have accountability in this. Mr. THOMPSON from California has played a very leading role in this, and it was so good to have him on the floor talking about it. Mr. IKE SKELTON, who is the chairman of our Armed Services Committee, has incorporated all of the major points of financial account-

ability to get out fraud and waste, to bring in the Defense Department's investigators to report to us on each of these areas, on a 6-month basis, to show us how the money is being spent.

All of those things are now in this package, and the benchmarks are in, the benchmarks. So we can hold the Iraqi people to, and say, these are things that must be accomplished, as we go forward. If you don't hold their feet to the fire, if you don't put pressure there, there is no accountability. So we are going to have them on security.

We are going to have them where they are going to reach the deal of how, which is at the bottom of the whole situation, is oil, and how they are to divide the oil revenue between the Kurds, between the Sunnis and between the Shias. We have got this in there for benchmarks.

The other thing we have in there is funds for the troops, the Humvee protection, the body armor production. Never again will they go in Humvees and have to write back to mom and dad to give them the metals. They are over there fighting for the United States of America. It is our constitutional responsibility as the Congress of the United States to raise and support the military. That's in article 1, section 6 of the Constitution for our duty. This Congress is able to do that in this.

Finally, what is so important, we are having in this measure true emergency measures like the children's health program, in which we have \$349 million now for that shortfall to help with the SCHIP program, for that lower-income program.

Many of those children, incidentally, Mr. ROSS, are children of some of these servicemen who are serving in Iraq, because their income level falls too low for Medicaid, yet not high enough to be able to afford the regular practice. The money is in here for the veterans to make sure the Walter Reed situation doesn't happen again. That's what's so important. That's what the American people want.

In this measure we have got that, and then plus \$2.4 billion more than what the President asks for the troops. But we have got the accountability in, and it's geared to moving us in a way to get us out of the crosshairs of this civil war and in this occupation in Iraq so that we can strengthen our military and put the resources in Afghanistan and Pakistan where we know al Qaeda is and allow the Iraqi people to manifest themselves and solve this civil war among themselves.

Thank you. It has been wonderful being with you and being a part of our Blue Dog coalition this evening.

DELIVERY OF HEALTH CARE IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIRE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 60 minutes.